D# 24 BULK STANDARDS AND DENSITY CALCULATIONS

General Description

This proposal would evaluate the method of height measurement for structures. The analysis would focus on measuring height from the existing grade, rather than finished grade. Furthermore, the definition of height would be revised to be consistent with the definition in the International Building Code, which defines building height as the vertical distance from grade plane to the average height of the highest roof surface.

In addition, the definition of net density would be reviewed with a recommendation to exempt slopes that were created by previous development (subject to a case-by-case determination). The net density definition would also be revised to exempt trails from the calculation.

Impact Analysis

Effect on rate of growth, development, and conversion of land as envisioned in the Plan

The rate of growth, development, and conversion of land would not be affected by this code provision. However, the quality and consistency of application of the development codes would be improved with regard to bulk/building height.

Effect on the City's capacity to provide adequate public facilities

This proposal is only changing administrative procedures. The City's capacity to provide adequate public facilities would not be affected.

Effect on the rate of population and employment growth

This proposal is only changing administrative procedures. The City's rate of population and employment growth would not be affected due to the proposal.

Whether Plan objectives are being met as specified or remain valid and desirable

The Comprehensive Plan Community Design Element Goals are to raise the aesthetic quality of the City, strengthen the economy through high quality development, and to ensure that a high quality of life is maintained as Renton evolves. Objective include recognition of the City's unique landform and vegetation (Objective CD-A). Policy CD-8 encourages the preservation of trees during development. Policy CD-18 encourages visual compatibility between new structures and other structures on site and on adjacent sites. Building height and bulk is a consideration in structure compatibility.

The proposed revisions seek to avoid the manipulation of grade height. With the recognition of existing site grades, alteration would be reduced, vegetation would be retained, and a reduction in potential drainage impacts to adjacent sites would be expected. Furthermore, structure height would be more consistent within the same zoning designation.

The proposed change to the net density definition to exempt trails would create an incentive for developers to plan for and include trails within residential developments. The goals, objectives, and policies would continue to be valid and desirable and would continue to be met with the proposed procedural change.

Effect on general land values or housing costs

This is a procedural change that may incrementally increase land development costs.

Whether capital improvements or expenditures are being made or completed as expected
There are no capital improvements or expenditures associated with this proposal.

Consistency with GMA, the Plan, and Countywide Planning Policies
This proposal is consistent with the statewide Growth Management Act and City Comprehensive Plan which call for sound planning including effective administration of current and future residential and nonresidential uses in Urban Growth Areas.

Effect on critical areas and natural resource lands
The change in the method of measurement of building height from existing grades is a procedural change which may result in less alteration of existing site grades. Nearby critical areas and natural resouce areas may benefit particularily in terms of drainage.

Protected slopes created by previous development are not as sensitive as natural slopes, and should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to determine whether the manmade slope should be deducted for purposes of net density.

Effect on other considerations
This proposal would result in greater consistency between the City's definition of building height and the International Building Code. In addition, the City's method of determining building height would be comparable to that of other surrounding cities, such as the City of Mercer Island.

The proposed change to the definition of net density to exempt trails may incentivize developers to include more trails in residential and mixed use projects. In addition, the developer should be allowed to request relief from deducting protected slopes from density when the protected slope was created as the result of previous development activity.

Staff Recommendation

- Staff recommends that the definition of building height contained within Title IV be revised to match the definition contained within the International Building Code.
- Staff recommends that building height be measured from existing grade. This elevation would be established by averaging the elevation of the existing grade.
- Staff recommends that the definition of net density be revised to exempt trails, and to exempt certain protected slopes, when their creation is the result of previous development activity.

Implementation Requirements
Sections in Title IV of the City Code should be amended to reflect this proposal. These code sections are as follows:

RMC 4-11-020, Building Height
RMC 4-11-040, Density - Net
RMC 4-11-070, Add New Definition: "Grade, Existing" and "Grade Plane"

The following attachments reflect the above changes:

- Attachment A: RMC4-11-020 Definitions

BUILDING HEIGHT: The vertical distance from grade plane to the average height of the highest roof surface. ~~above a referenced datum measured to the highest point of the coping of a flat roof or to the deck line of a mansard roof or to the average height of the highest gable of a pitched or hipped roof. The reference datum shall be selected by either of the following, whichever yields a greater height of building:~~

~~1. The elevation of the highest adjoining sidewalk or ground surface within a five foot (5') horizontal distance of the exterior wall of the building when such sidewalk or ground surface is not more than ten feet (10') above lowest grade measured within a five foot (5') horizontal distance of the exterior wall of the building.~~

~~2. An elevation ten feet (10') higher than the lowest grade when the sidewalk or ground surface described in subsection A above is more than ten feet (10') above lowest grade measured within a five foot (5') horizontal distance of the exterior wall of the building.~~

GRADE: The vertical location of the ground surface.

GRADE, EXISTING: The surface level of the ground prior to alteration of the land by grading.

GRADE, FINISH: The surface level of the ground after completion of all grading.

GRADE PLANE: A reference plane representing the average of finished ground level adjoining the building at exterior walls. Where the finished ground level slopes away from the exterior walls, the reference plane shall be established by the lowest points within the area between the building and the lot line, or, where the lot line is more than 6 feet from the building, between the building and a point 6 feet from the building.

DENSITY, NET: A calculation of the number of housing units and/or lots that would be allowed on a property after critical areas, i.e., very high landslide hazard areas, protected slopes (except evaluate on a case-by-case basis those protected slopes created by previous development), wetlands, Class 1 to 4 streams and lakes, or floodways, and public rights-of-way and legally recorded private access easements are subtracted from the gross area (gross acres minus streets and critical areas multiplied by allowable housing units per acre). Required critical area buffers, streams that have been daylighted including restored riparian and aquatic areas, and public and private alleys, and trails, shall not be subtracted from gross acres for the purpose of net density calculations.